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ABSTRACT

College students who were preparing for service-oriented careers as teachers, social workers, nurses, and probation officers, were studied to determine whether the students held prejudicial attitudes based on skin color. Photographs of blacks and Caucasians, matched so that paired persons were of the same racial group, sex, and age level, and through photographic underexposure such that the matched pairs differed in the intensity of their skin color, were shown to the college students. The students assigned predetermined positive or negative statements concerning intelligence, personality, and appearance, to either person of a matched pair. Results indicated that darkness of skin color did not appear to have as great an effect on the students' judgment of white girls (who were regarded in a positive way most often), black girls and white boys, as it did for black boys. Prejudice based on inherited physical characteristics such as darkness of skin, coupled with gender (male) bias, was offered as an explanation for the self-fulfilling prophecy of low or negative expectations for boys who are black. (MJL)

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College Students Cope with Color

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Over 30 years ago, prior to the Civil Rights Movement in this country, Comas stated:

> Our own civilization attaches special importance to the colour of the skin and relatively dark pigmentation is a mark of difference condemning numerous human groups to contempt, ostracism, and a debased social status. In certain persons' colour prejudice is so strong as to give rise to almost pathological phobias; these are not innate but reflect, in an exaggerated form, the prejudices of the social environment. (Comas, 1951)

The negative evaluations and the devisive barriers to human association, based on skin color, led Graubard, in 1967, to relate that:

> The uniqueness of the present study derives from its acceptance of the fact that people continue to regard the value of other humans as being somehow related to their skin color, and that this is true in varying degrees in many places of the world. (Graubard, 1967)

After many years of social programs funded by private foundations and governmental sources, the issue of racial prejudice based on skin color remains a concern and has been studied with various population groups. One wonders if greater awareness of the problem through the mass media has led to a reduction of prejudice towards people of color, in general, and black people, in particular.

Researchers have studied the selection of whites over blacks by teachers in terms of preference for physical characteristics or projecting degree of success in athletic, social, or academic skills. Black youth receive unfavorable teacher expectations

and are treated less favorably in classroom situations, according to several studies, (Coates, Foster, and Furr, 1971; Friend and Wood, 1973; Cooper, Baron, and Lowe, 1975).

The white teacher's bias against black children has been confirmed (Brown, 1968; Leacock, 1969) and especially against gifted black children (Rubovits and Maehr, 1973).

Recent studies show similar results. Looking at the effects of race, physical attractiveness, and dialect on teachers' evaluations, it was found that black students, black-English speaking students, and low attractive students were rated lower. (DeMeis and Turner, 1978) Race and physical attractiveness effects were studied in terms of the expectations held by teachers of preschool students. Boys, unattractive children, and black children were given less favorable ratings. (Adams, 1978) Following student teaching, student teacher ratings of black children's transgressions significantly increased, while ratings of white children's transgressions remained the same. (Marwit, Marwit, and Walker, 1978)

Recognizing the fact that prejudicial attitudes of teachers has been somewhat established by various studies found in the literature, the present study attempted to determine if prejudice based upon skin coloration was evident while controlling such variables as sex and race. The intent of the study was to examine the attitudes of college students who were preparing for careers in the "helping professions" (teachers, social workers, nurses, and probation officers).

Design

There are no standardized instruments available for testing adult reactions to intensity of skin coloration. Efforts to test perceptions regarding skin coloration in the past have included the use of dolls, cartoons, and photographs. In the present study, black and white photographs were used.

School pictures of blacks and Caucasians from elementary, junior high, and high school were gathered with a preliminary pairing by the investigator so that a match was made with two persons who were of the same racial group, sex, and age level. Care was taken so that the matched pairs were similar in expression, and general appearance. The matched pairs differed in intensity of skin coloration. All photographs were black and white with darker skin coloration achieved for some, by underexposing the photograph, to accentuate differences.

Each matched pair was mounted on a single piece of white tagboard with numbers affixed to each photograph. Thirty pairs were given to six judges who rated each match of the pairs on an independent basis. Half of the judges were Caucasians and half were black. There was an even balance of male and female judges.

Judges were asked to disregard the lightness or darkness of each picture and to rank the match according to sex, age, expression, and general appearance. Separate categories were provided for elementary, junior high and high school. They were also asked to identify (by number) any pairs they felt were mismatched. Some suggestions were given for better matches, as well as designation of poor matches.

Instrumentation

From the 30 matched pairs, a final instrument was constructed with the 20 matched pairs. These were divided so that an equal number of students were included in terms of race, sex, and age level. To simplify the age level, the junior high/high school groups were combined. The final instrument included five matched pairs of black males, five of black females, five of Caucasian males, and five of Caucasian females.

Ten positive statements and ten negative statements were equally divided between racial groups and evenly distributed between the sexual groups. The statements were categorized under the following headings: intelligence/talent (I won a scholarship), athletic skills (I won the athletic award), social skills/personality (I was voted "most popular"), and physical appearance (The art class uses me as a model). Examples cited were positive statements. An equal number of negative statements were used.

Each pair was numbered with a statement printed below the picture of the matched pair and was developed into a slide. All of the 20 slides were shown in random order.

It was hypothesized that there would be no difference in the responses of the subjects to the darker or lighter person in either of the two racial groups

Procedure

The set of the 20 slides plus directions for marking, and a response sheet were presented to six classes in a midwestern university. Three of the classes were in elementary education and

the remaining three classes were in sociology. In addition to students with majors in elementary education, there were others majoring in criminal justice, sociology, social work, and nursing. It was felt that a disguised technique would lend itself best to measuring reactions based on skin coloration. The instrument was presented as a study in intuition. Students were told that a statement would be made, and a slide of two students would appear. They were to determine which student was being described and to mark their answer accordingly on an answer sheet provided. A 30 second view of the slide was given, followed by a 30 second pause before presenting the next slide.

Responses were scored by the researcher so that positive statements attributed by the respondents to darker skinned persons in the slides were given a value of two. Negative statements attributed to those with lighter colored skin were also given a value of two. Other responses were given a value of one.

In all, complete ratings by 131 college students were obtained.

Results

Mean scores of the responses were calculated for each of the 20 slides in the instrument. A coefficient of alpha index was then used. This procedure did not produce a reliability of scoring. Lack of scoring reliability eliminated the application of additional statistical tests which might have been used.

A rank order of the mean scores of the 20 slides was made. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Mean Scores of the Twenty Slides in Rank Order

Presentation Order	Sex	Race	Statement Category	Statement Type	Mean	Rank
7	F	NW	PA	P	1.817	1
6	F	NW	I/T	N	1.743	2
1	M	W	I/T	P	1.695	3
19	F	W	SS/P	N	1.672	4
11	M	W	AS	N	1.634	5
16	F	NW	AS	N	1.634	6
9	M	W	I/T	N	1.618	7
3	M	NW	SS/P	N	1.573	8
2	F	W	SS/P	P	1.557	9
5	F	W	I/T	N	1.527	10
12	F	W	PA	N	1.511	11
						Median
13	F	NW	I/T	P	1.397	12
8	M	W	PA	P	1.359	13
18	F	W	AS	P	1.321	14
14	M	NW	I/T	P	1.298	15
15	M	W	SS/P	P	1.290	16
4	M	NW	SS/P	N	1.168	17
10	F	NW	SS/P	P	1.160	18
20	M	NW	AS	P	1.099	19
17	M	NW	PA	N	1.069	20

Symbols:

Race - W=White NW=nonwhite

Statement Category - I/T=Intelligence/Talent
AS=Athletic Skills
SS/P=Social Skills/Personality
PA=Physical Appearance

Statement Type - P=Positive
N=Negative

The mean scores ranged from a high of 1.817 to a low of 1.069. It was found that four of the five (80%) slides with black males were ranked below the median, as well as comprising the two lowest scores. Two of the five (40%) of the black females were below the median, as well as two of the five slides of Caucasian males. Only one of five, or 20% of the Caucasian females were below the median rank.

Black males were ranked below the median in each of the following categories: intelligence/talent, social skills/personality, athletic skills, and physical appearance. Intelligence/talent and social skills/personality were the two categories in which black females were ranked below the median. Categories for Caucasian males were physical appearance and social skills/personality; for Caucasian females, it was athletic skill.

No analysis of the data was made of the respondents by sex or their college major.

Discussion

It would seem that for the subjects in this study who were preparing for careers in the "helping professions," in which encounters with black youngsters are likely, an apparent prejudice based upon darkness of skin coloration appears when the variables of sex and race are combined. With 80% of the black males ranked below the median, a negative bias is one interpretation which could be made of this finding.

What has been long-known in education is that boys, in general, have not been regarded by teachers with the degree of positivism as girls. In this study, it was found that black boys who were

darker in skin coloration were regarded negatively more often than any of the other groups. It should be noted that white females were judged in a positive way most often, followed by an equal regard for black females and white boys.

Darkness of skin coloration did not appear to have as great an effect on the judgment of the respondents for white girls and boys, nor for black girls, as it did for black boys. Prejudice based upon inherited physical characteristics (darkness of skin), when coupled with gender (male) bias, may offer some possible explanations of the self-fulfilling prophecy of low or negative expectations for boys who are black.

Further evidence supporting this notion may be found in one of several studies conducted by the Children's Defense Fund in which an analysis of school suspensions revealed that such suspensions fell disproportionately upon children who were black, older, poor, and male. (Student Suspensions, 1976)

While consistency of selection by the respondents would have been desirable, because additional analysis would have been possible, this is not surprising or unexpected. The author of a study of white attitudes towards black people which was based on a sample of nearly 6,000 people, concluded that racial attitudes of white Americans are ambiguous and in conflict. (Campbell, 1971) Still, there is hope. One study which conducted a pre-test of the racial bias of teachers and administrators based on skin coloration, found a dramatic change in the post test following a four week workshop. (Hamm and Wedemeyer, 1974)

Healthy, unbias attitudes are as important as knowledge acquisition for those involved in the "helping professions." Further investigations should be encouraged in this important area of prejudice, based on sex, race, and skin coloration. Awareness of prejudiced behavior can be a valuable vehicle for self-assessment and change for fair-minded individuals.

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Abstract

College Student Cope with Color

In order to measure the responses of college students at a large mid-western university with majors in the "helping professions" (criminal justice, social work, nursing, and education), a special instrument designed to elicit different responses to skin coloration was constructed. Through the validation of independent raters, 20 pairs of black and white photographs were matched by sex, race, age, expression and general appearance. The main difference in each of the pairs was that one of the subjects in the photograph was considerably darker in skin coloration than the other. Photographs of elementary, junior high and high school age students were used. Five matched pairs of each of the following groups were included: white females, black females, white males, and black males. Ten positive and ten negative statements were equally divided between racial groups and evenly distributed between the sexual groups.

The final instrument was made into slides which were projected as 20 pairs, one-at-a-time with a statement (negative or positive). Respondents were asked to select the subject whom they thought was represented by the statement. Since the instrument was presented to the college students as a measurement of intuition, they were unaware of the true purpose of the measurement.

Analysis of the responses of 131 college students revealed a negative bias toward darker-skinned males who are black. The author related this to other studies in which racial bias towards black males was present and discusses the possible impact of this finding.